

Johann Pachelbel

Yoh'-hahn Pahk'-uhl-behl

A composer of the Baroque Era



born
August, 1653
Nuremberg, Germany

died
March, 1706
Nuremberg, Germany

“
Love it or hate
it, Pachelbel’s
Canon in D is one
of the most famous
pieces of classical
music of all time.
”

—*classicfm.com*

We do not know the exact date of Johann Pachelbel’s birth. We know he was baptized on September 1, 1653, so he was most likely born a few days before that. As a boy Johann was an excellent student and showed great interest in music. He enrolled at the University of Attendorf in Austria at the age of 15; however, he had to drop out after one year because his father could not pay the tuition.

Luckily, Johann received a scholarship to a school in Regensburg, Germany, where he was able to continue his education and take private music lessons. After completing his studies, Johann lived for a time in Vienna, Austria, where he served as an organist at a cathedral. At that time, Vienna was the musical center of Europe, and here Johann befriended many important musicians and composers.

In 1677 Pachelbel moved to Eisenach, Germany, and took a position as court organist for a prince. He also began composing music, a task that was often expected of **court musicians**. While in Eisenach, Pachelbel got to know the Bach family and gave music lessons to Johann Christoph Bach, an older brother of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Pachelbel stayed in Eisenach a year before moving to Erfurt, Germany. He remained in Erfurt for 12 years, and it was here that he became known as one of the premier organists and composers in Europe. He served various churches in Erfurt, always as organist and composer. Sometimes he was also responsible for organ maintenance.

Pachelbel married Barbara Gabler in 1681, and their first child, a son, was born two years later. Soon after, a plague swept through the area, killing Johann’s wife and son. Within a year, Pachelbel married Judith Drommer. They would have five sons and two daughters. Sons Wilhelm and Charles became composers, and Charles moved to America in 1734.

Pachelbel moved to Stuttgart, Germany in 1690 (age 37), where he was employed as a court organist for a duchess. He spent the years 1692 through 1694 as town organist in Gotha, Germany. Pachelbel always kept close ties to his friends in Eisenach, especially the Bach family. In 1694 he attended the wedding of his former student, Johann Christoph Bach. It was here that he most likely met the nine-year-old Johann Sebastian Bach.

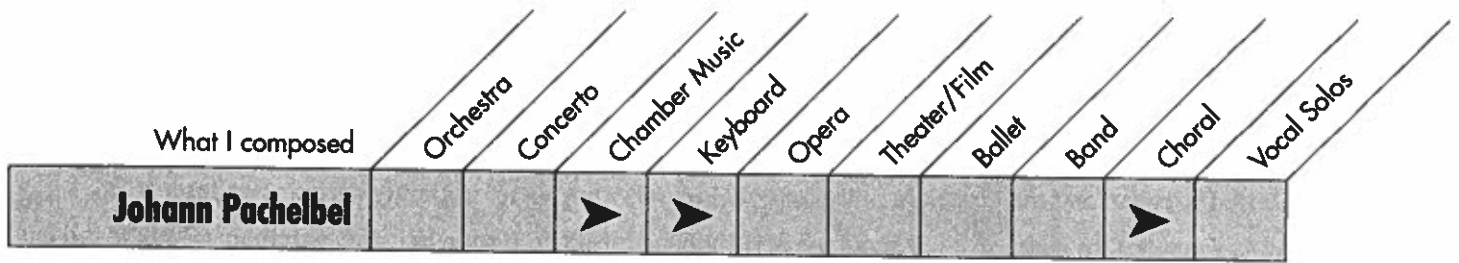
In 1695 Pachelbel was hired as an organist/composer by city officials in Nuremberg, Germany. He spent the rest of his life in Nuremberg, where he devoted most of his time to composing. During his final years, Pachelbel published several collections of his compositions.

Johann Pachelbel died in early March 1706 and was buried on March 9. Although he was well-known and respected as a composer during his lifetime, Pachelbel is best known today for the influence he had on younger composers, including his two sons and members of the Bach family.

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Johann Pachelbel



Pachelbel Factoids:

- Johann Pachelbel's son, Charles, moved to the American colonies. He lived first in Boston and then in Charleston, South Carolina, where he organized concerts, opened a singing school, and served as organist at St. Philip's Church.
- Pachelbel was the godfather to Johann Sebastian Bach's sister, Johanna Juditha Bach.
- *Canon in D*, an instrumental work composed by Pachelbel, is one of the most performed works in the history of music. It is often played at weddings.
- During his lifetime, Pachelbel was known primarily as a composer of music for organ, although he wrote many choral and instrumental works as well.

Famous Works:

Canon in D for strings
His chorale **preludes** for organ
His toccatas and fugues for organ

1653: Birth of Johann Pachelbel. Russia annexes the Ukraine.

1664: Isaac Newton experiments with gravity.

1665: A plague spreads through London, killing 75,000 people.

1670: The city of Charleston is founded in present day South Carolina.

1676: Antoni van Leeuwenhoek discovers bacteria.

1682: French explorer La Salle travels the entire length of the Mississippi River.

1692: Salem witch trials begin in Massachusetts.

1699: French settlers move into Louisiana.

1706: Death of Johann Pachelbel. Benjamin Franklin is born.

What in the world is happening?

Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706)***Canon and Gigue for three violins and basso continuo***

By far, Johann Pachelbel's most famous composition was his *Canon and Gigue for three violins and basso continuo*, commonly called his "Canon in D" or simply "Pachelbel's Canon" (in German *Kanon und Gigue für drei Violinen mit Generalbaß*). Both the canon and the gigue are in the key of D Major. They were originally paired together.

The piece was forgotten for centuries, rediscovered and published in 1919. It soon became extremely popular, and has often been used in commercials, quoted in pop music, and also featured in the 1980 Oscar-winning film *Ordinary People*.

It is a true canon in three parts, with each violin playing the same melody but two measures apart. Below these melodies, the low bass voice, the basso continuo, plays the same two-bar line 28 times throughout the piece. This repeated line is known as a "ground bass" or "ostinato." The same eight chords are used and repeated, following the bass line:

D Major	G Major
A Major	D Major
B minor	G Major
F# minor	A Major

The three violins change what they are playing every four measures. They start with quarter notes, move to eighth notes, then to sixteenth notes, leaping notes, a thirty-second note pattern, and move on to a variety of variations from there.

It is not known exactly when Pachelbel composed this piece—perhaps around 1680. Some scholars believe the piece may have been written for the wedding of Johann Sebastian Bach's brother, Johann Christoph, which Pachelbel attended and provided music for, on October 23, 1694. Pachelbel's *Canon in D* has been recorded hundreds of times. Several other famous classical composers, including Handel, Mozart, and Haydn, have quoted the memorable bass line in their subsequent compositions.

- See if you can time your steps to walk down the aisle with a partner, imagining you're at your wedding. What kind of mood does this music put you in?
- Try to sing the bass line, in your octave. Or learn to play it on the piano or another instrument.

Pachelbel's *Canon in D* has been used as part of several pop songs, and was used as a theme in the 1980 motion picture *Ordinary People*.

TIMING

- :01** The opening "basso continuo" is heard (harpsichord playing chords in the background).
- :11** Quarter note melody is heard on Violin 1.
- :21** Violin 2 joins in on same melody.
- :31** Violin 3 joins in on original melody while Violin 1 moves to an eighth note pattern. Others follow.
- :52** Moving sixteenth note pattern begins in Violin 1.
- 1:11** Listen for leaping quarter notes followed by a quarter rest.
- 1:32** Violin 1 begins a thirty-second note pattern, based on the scale.
- 2:00** Development adds staccato notes and rests.
- 2:10** New melodic patterns appear again, using neighboring notes in different octaves.
- 2:50** Yet another vibrant variation begins, more majestic.

Review!

I'm not just a one-hit wonder!



Johann Pachelbel

Name _____

Place the letter of the correct answer in the space provided.
For True/False questions, print True or False in the space provided.

- Pachelbel spent most of his life in _____.
A. Germany
B. Austria
C. United States
D. Hungary
- True or False: In the late 1600s, Vienna, Austria, was the musical center of Europe. _____
- Pachelbel was _____.
A. a premier organist
B. a composer
C. responsible for organ maintenance
D. all of the above
- True or False: A plague killed Pachelbel's second wife and daughter.

- True or False: Pachelbel was close friends with the Bach family. _____
- In 1665, Pachelbel was hired as an organist/composer by city officials in _____.
A. Vienna, Austria
B. Nuremburg, Germany
C. Stuttgart, Germany
D. Gotha, Germany
- True or False: Pachelbel is perhaps best known for the influence he had on younger composers. _____
- Pachelbel's *Canon* was originally written for _____.
A. woodwind quartet
B. harpsichord and three flutes
C. three violins and bass
D. full orchestra
- True or False: The Listening Example is written in the key of D Major.

- In Pachelbel's *Canon*, the same pattern of _____ chords are used over and over again, and the bass line is repeated _____ times.
A. 8
B. 4
C. 28
D. 18

Bonus:

The repeating bass line in the Listening Example is known as a ground bass or _____.